

**Welcoming the strangers –
Refugees, migrants and asylum seekers**
A message on welcoming the stranger and scriptural conflict

Governing authority or God's authority?

The following program was prepared by Joan Maruskin, published with permission

*Note: A **refugee** is a person, who has been forced to cross and international border because they fear being persecuted because of their race, ethnicity, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political affiliation. They must be identified as a refugee in a country other than their country of origin and then interviewed and cleared for admission to the U.S. resettlement program. Less than one percent of the world's refugees are ever permanently resettled. An **asylum seeker** fears the same type of persecution as refugees, but asks for asylum on arriving in a safe country. **Migrants** are forced to leave their homes seeking gainful employment to support their families or themselves.*

SOLO: "Rivers of Babylon"

FIRST READER: (NRSV) Romans 13:1-5

1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; 4 for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience.

ADAM AND EVE: Our names are Adam and Eve. (A) We lied to the king of kings and have been sent into exile to work the fields. (E) We are migrants forced to live off the land looking for work. (Both) Will you give us work?

CONGREGATION: You have no documents. You will take our jobs. Go away...The U.S. welcomes only persons with proper documents. You have crossed the border illegally.... you are only hungry and have no home. Sorry, you must go.

NOAH: My name is Noah. There was a great flood! Only my family and the animals - two of each kind - survived. Our home is gone. Please take us in.

CONGREGATION: Natural disasters need to be dealt with where they happened. We can't take everyone in. You are migrants. Sorry, go somewhere else...our laws do not provide a place for you.

ABRAHAM AND SARAH: (A) God told us to leave our homes and to travel to this the place God has shown us. (S) Will you give us a home?

CONGREGATION: People who hear voices are not wanted here. You would drain our medical system. We would have to pay for your health care. Sorry, the U.S. is selective about who can come to our country.

JACOB: I am Jacob; my older brother has threatened to kill me. I can't go home. Please take me in.

CONGREGATION: We have our own family problems. Domestic violence is not grounds for admittance. Our laws will not grant you sanctuary. Sorry, go home and work it out with your brother.

JOSEPH: I am Joseph; my brothers sold me into slavery. I was brought to the United States to work. Please help me.

CONGREGATION: Slavery is against the law. We don't have slaves in the United States. You must have the proper documents to work here. You have no legal right to be here. Sorry, you will be sent home.

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS: (1) We are Joseph's brothers. (2) There is famine in our land. (3) We have no food to eat. (All) Will you feed us and give us a home?

CONGREGATION: Famine and starvation are not grounds for admission to the U. S. You are migrants and would eat our food and take our jobs. Sorry, our county's laws will not let you stay here. You must return to your home country and see if you can find a legal way to get here.

MOSES: My name is Moses. I killed an Egyptian, who was mistreating my people. I had to flee. Please, please protect me.

CONGREGATION: You are a criminal alien. There are laws against people like you. The U.S. doesn't give asylum to criminals. Sorry, you will be sent back. We have enough of our own criminals.

AARON: I am Aaron, spokesperson for the nation of Israel. We are workers, good brick makers, carpenters, and farm workers. We are strong and willing workers. We are looking for the Promised Land. We are seeking permission to enter, my people are waiting on the other side of the fence, and we can harvest your crops and build your houses.

CONGREGATION: You are migrants! You had jobs in your country; you just didn't like the working conditions and you think you can get better pay here. Sorry, we need our jobs for our people. You are undocumented - you will have to stay on the other side of the border.

RUTH: I am Ruth. My husband died, I followed my mother in law to her country, the United States. I have no family - only Naomi. Please help me.

CONGREGATION: Naomi is welcome. She is a citizen, but you have no legal right to be here – you are not her daughter. We are sorry that our husband died, but you will have to leave. We don't want you harvesting our crops and taking our benefits.

ESTHER: I am Esther; I have been trafficked and was brought here to be used for a high official's sexual pleasure. Please help me.

CONGREGATION: You have no right to be here. Trafficking of people has to be stopped. We are a moral people. We are people who are subject to the governing authorities. They will put you in prison until we can deport you. You weren't persecuted – you were just kidnapped. Your country should protect you. Sorry, but you will have to go home.

MARY, JESUS, JOSEPH: I am Joseph, this is my wife Mary and our son Jesus. We have had to flee our country; the king is killing all the boys less than two years of age. (M) We fled in the middle of the night we have nothing and we have no identification. (M&J) Will you give us work and sanctuary and asylum?

CONGREGATION: We are willing to help you, but there are laws that have to be followed. Our law states that if you enter without documents, you have to seek asylum from prison. Joseph you will go to one prison. Mary, you will go to another, and Jesus, you will go to a third (until we find foster care for you, that is.) We are sorry, but that's the law.

SAMARITAN: Please help me. I'm from Samaria and I'm not documented. I saw a man, a United States citizen, being robbed. I stopped to help him. The police came, when they asked for identification, I ran I just tried to help ... please, please, help me my wife is a U.S. citizen and our children will starve if I can't work.

CONGREGATION: Laws have to be followed. You have no right to be here. Our government will send you back. We are sorry, but you will have to leave the United States, and since your wife is a U.S. citizen, she and the children can stay here without you or leave and go with you.

JESUS: They call me Jesus. I come begging for help for my 12 friends. When we got off the plane, we asked for asylum. They were being persecuted in our homeland for following me. But the U.S. government officials didn't believe us. Everyone but me is in expedited removal...they are all being sent back. I managed to slip away and came here to this church to ask for help.

CONGREGATION: The United States has laws to keep out terrorists. Our government is a terror to bad conduct. You are one of 13 Middle Eastern men. We heard about you. You meet in rented rooms, you go into the mountains for private meetings, no one knows

where you get your money, and you travel by boat and meet with strangers. You are trying to organize the poor and the oppressed. You could very well be a terrorist. Expedited removal will make certain you can't harm us. We are sorry, but you and the 12 other men, will have to leave. It's the law. The authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of ---- conscience.

SECOND READER: Romans 12:9-13 9

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Romans 13:8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law

JESUS: "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." 37 Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" 40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

MESSAGE

CLOSING PRAYER: God of immigrants and refugees, you have saved us from all that has threatened us since the beginning of our days. We are strangers who have found our home in you. Help us to open our hearts and hands to those who come seeking freedom and life. Save them as we strive to be their sanctuary. We pray in the name of our refugee brother, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: "SANCTUARY"

Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. And with thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you. (Sung three times)

At this time, advocacy is needed in the U.S. House and Senate to develop comprehensive immigration reform that will help migrants, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

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